BIC Statement on Best Practice for Subtitle Field in Metadata Feeds

9th March 2018,

Some publishers and other metadata providers are using the subtitle, and sometimes the title fields, in metadata feeds to carry marketing and promotional text. By this we mean using phrases such as *'Sunday Times Best Seller', 'Gripping read from…', 'The Richard & Judy Book Club thriller 2017', '" The best thriller writer alive" Another Author', 'Man Booker prize winner'* and so on. It is important for discoverability, good customer experience and an efficient data supply chain that these data fields reflect only the true title and subtitle text that appears on the title page. The valuable promotional text should be included in separate and dedicated promotional text fields, and all metadata recipients, including wholesalers and retailers, should be using these fields appropriately.

There has been a significant escalation of this practice over the last twelve months, despite consistent feedback from BIC members across the book trade that this is causing substantial time-consuming work to correct at various points throughout the supply chain. BIC has seen numerous examples that are confusing and misleading for consumers trying to make a buying decision. Feedback received to date also reveals this poor practice is having an adverse effect on supply chain efficiency both in terms of the timing of product to market and costs incurred by retailers and aggregators having to remove the unwanted text.

BIC understands the need to provide promotional and marketing text and the temptation to include it in the subtitle field, but advises publishers and other metadata providers that the title and subtitle fields should only ever be populated with the true title and subtitle, as would be used on the book's title page. If it's not included on the title page, it shouldn't appear in the title or subtitle fields in the metadata. Neither field should be used for sharing promotional information. In order to promote, sell and find books efficiently, booksellers, data aggregators, libraries and others need clear bibliographic details as well as clearly separate promotional text. Industry-standard ONIX metadata has distinct fields for promotional and marketing information that meet this need.

BIC and its members (including those at Board and Metadata Committee level) urge publishers and other metadata providers misusing title or subtitle in this way to cease the practice immediately. Not only is it not wanted by retailers or libraries and hugely confusing for the book buyer, the inclusion of promotional information in the subtitle field could adversely affect Product Data Accreditation of the data supplier in the future. Continued misuse may lead data recipients to ignore subtitles altogether or 'lock' key data fields after manual correction (thus preventing metadata updates or delaying visibility of products online).

Equally, BIC and its members urge wholesalers and retailers (particularly those operating online) to make use of correctly-supplied promotional text, ensuring it is displayed prominently to the customer and indexed for search purposes.

Please refer to the range of best practice guidance below for confirmation of how to use title and subtitle fields correctly, and for how to deliver promotional text effectively. You can also refer to your data aggregator for advice in this area.

Industry Support from Retailers

Amazon's *ONIX Submission Guidelines* emphasise the importance of Title and Subtitle as they "drive many of the processes to build clear and customer-friendly detail pages. […] As a general rule, do not append anything else in [these elements] besides what actually appears on the [book]." Its KDP metadata guidance also states that title and subtitle in the metadata must match the book itself.

Blackwell's "has customers ranging from University Librarians, world-class research centres, government departments, through to High Street book buyers. Excellence in bibliographic data ensures that we can deliver the appropriate information for each of these customer groups. Bibliographic standards and adherence to these, ensures we can do this effectively."
Kieron Smith, Digital Director at Blackwell's Bookshops.

Kobo Writing Life guidelines are clear on misuse of title and subtitles fields and state "Book titles, subtitles, series titles or author fields that include extraneous words that are not actually part of the official title, subtitle, series title or author name are not acceptable and lead to confusion and the corruption of metadata standards. We respectfully request that you ensure your catalog of titles does not include such details so that the overall Kobo catalog can offer the purest experience for our customers around the world."

Waterstones – "We expect the bibliographic subtitle feed to contain just that - the subtitle of the book. Marketing and promotional information has no place in this field, not least because it can lead to confusion over search results for customers, but also because it might appear to them as a Waterstones endorsement, which it is not. This activity does not help us to sell extra copies of the book, in fact, titles displaying marketing information in the subtitle feed are at risk of being removed from our campaign and round-up pages, and delayed from email sends until they are manually repaired by our content team. We actively remove superfluous information found in this field and, if necessary, lock the bibliographic record which means that no further information updates will take place. If this activity continues we will have to decide whether to display the subtitle field at all. We simply ask that publishers and other metadata providers use the field in the manner in which it is defined."

The Booksellers Association "supports this statement from BIC and agrees that misusing key bibliographic data fields to carry marketing messages is not desirable, and recommends all publishers and other metadata providers follow the best practice guidance provided."
Fraser Tanner, The Booksellers Association and Batch

Industry Support from Data Agencies/Service providers

Bibliographic Data Services: "BDS has always been a supporter of bibliographic and trade standards being applied correctly so that customers get a predictable result when receiving an aggregated feed. There are legitimate ways to promote promotional information in the ONIX structure, and we would recommend that these fields are used for supporting sales and marketing content ".
Eric Green, Managing Director, Digital, Bibliographic Data Services.

Bowker "supports this statement from BIC and emphasizes the importance of using fields correctly and following best practice guidelines to ensure our Library and Retail customers are fed the most accurate metadata."
Pat Payton; Senior Manager; Provider Relations; ProQuest & Bowker.

Nielsen Book "supports BIC in addressing this important issue. We will continue to work with our data suppliers and recipients throughout the metadata supply chain to ensure that all the essential bibliographic and promotional information that consumers need flows as seamlessly as possible."
Stephen Long, Global Managing Director, Book Discovery and Commerce, Nielsen Book.

Industry Support from the Library Sector

The British Library - Timely and accurate metadata underpins supply chain efficiencies. Inappropriate usage of ONIX fields therefore wastes valuable processing resources and introduces unnecessary delays for all consumers of the data. The British Library fully supports BIC in drawing attention to this issue and calls on all creators of ONIX metadata to comply with the standard as defined and to use EDItEUR's best practice guidance.
Alasdair Ball (Head of Collection Management, The British Library)

CILIP - "On behalf of the UK library and information community, CILIP strongly endorses the BIC position on the appropriate use of the Subtitle Field. The efficiency of the book industry supply chain depends on all parties committing to standards, which includes the use of metadata fields for their intended purpose. As librarians providing services to the public, we need to know that we can depend on aggregated information to fulfil our public task and that we can rely on information that is intended to be impartial being so. We believe that ONIX provides ample opportunity to include promotional information without needing to misuse the Subtitle Field for this purpose."

Nick Poole, Chief Executive, CILIP (UK Library & Information Association) and Chair, BIC Executive Board

Standards and Best Practice Documentation

EDItEUR's *ONIX Implementation and Best Practice Guide* http://www.editeur.org/93/Release-3.0-Downloads/#Best practice notes that promotional text such as that often inserted into subtitle field should instead be carried in the 'Promotional headline' field. "Common issues in P.6: use of <Subtitle> to carry a marketing message. Retailers and librarians consider promotional subtitles that do not reflect the text on a book's title page a serious problem. Use <TextContent> in Group P.14 with <TextType> code 10 ['promotional headline'] for short promotional messages and code 09 ['endorsement'] for third-party endorsements." For ONIX 2.1, promotional headlines should use <OtherText> with <TextTypeCode> 09, and endorsements should use <TextTypeCode> 30.

BIC's range of **BIC Bites** (short introductions to a topic) include an Introduction to BIC Basic Metadata (http://www.bic.org.uk/files/pdfs/BIC BITES/BIC Bites Introduction to BIC Basic Metadata_FINAL.pdf)

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About BIC:

BIC is the UK book industry's independent supply chain organisation and is charged with making the print and digital book supply chain more efficient which we do by:
• Developing standards and promoting their adoption,
• Connecting experts across industry
• Enabling innovation in the supply chain

Established in 1991, BIC is an independent, not for profit members' organisation working at the heart of the UK book industry. It is sponsored by The Booksellers Association, The British Library, The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals and The Publishers Association to promote supply chain efficiency in all sectors of the book world through e-commerce, best practice, training, events, and the application of standard processes and procedures. BIC is governed by an Executive and an Operational Board, both of which are comprised of members across the entire book industry. Visit BIC at www.bic.org.uk and follow at @BIC1UK